

September 22, 2019

Called
God Calls Samuel
1 Samuel 3:1-10

Opening words: This is the definition of called: (according to CRU, formally Campus Crusade for Christ) Calling, is the truth that God calls us to himself so decisively that everything we are, everything we do, and everything we have is invested with a special devotion, dynamism, and direction lived out as a response to his summons and service. That definition reminds me of my calling. Personally, I have never questioned my calling. It is my greatest resource. I am both humbled and proud that God called me, with my unique combination of strengths and weaknesses. My calling is a big part of my personal identity. Daily, I am reminded I am paid by this congregation and serve a United Methodist congregation, but I work for God. Let me say this clearly. You don't want a minister who hasn't been called.

Our scripture reading for today comes from First Samuel. At one time First and Second Samuel were one literary piece. It was divided into two, when the Old Testament was translated into Latin. The book is named after the person God used to create a kingship in Israel. Never forget, Samuel anointed the first two kings of Israel, Saul and David. The date of the book is unknown because the author is unknown. The first three chapters of First Samuel are fundamental because they deal with the birth, youth and calling of Samuel. Our scripture reading for today is First Samuel 3:1-10. Let me call this message *God Calls Samuel*.

1 Samuel 3:1-10 The boy Samuel ministered before the LORD under Eli. In those days the word of the LORD was rare; there were not many visions. ² One night Eli, whose eyes were becoming so weak that he could barely see, was lying down in his usual place. ³ The lamp of God had not yet gone out, and Samuel was lying down in the house of the LORD, where the ark of God was. ⁴ Then the LORD called Samuel. Samuel answered, "Here I am." ⁵ And he ran to Eli and said, "Here I am; you called me." But Eli said, "I did not call; go back and lie down." So he went and lay down. ⁶ Again the LORD called, "Samuel!" And Samuel got up and went to Eli and said, "Here I am; you called me." "My son," Eli said, "I did not call; go back and lie down." ⁷ Now Samuel did not yet know the LORD: The word of the LORD had not yet been revealed to him. ⁸ A third time the LORD called, "Samuel!" And Samuel got up and went to Eli and said, "Here I am; you called me." Then Eli realized that the LORD was calling the boy. ⁹ So Eli told Samuel, "Go and lie down, and if he calls you, say, 'Speak, LORD, for your servant is listening.'" So Samuel went and lay down in his place. ¹⁰ The LORD came and stood there, calling as at the other times, "Samuel! Samuel!" Then Samuel said, "Speak, for your servant is listening."

Bryant H. McGill (born 1969) is a best-selling author. He once said, *"One of the sincerest forms of respect is actually listening to what another has to say."* I can't disagree with that quote. Have you ever stopped listening to someone who was talking to you? McGill is right. If you find some truth in that quote say, **"Amen!"**

We find ourselves today in the third chapter of First Samuel. The first two chapters give us some important background information. There was a woman by the name of Hannah, who had a difficult time conceiving a child. She prayed so earnestly for a child Hannah caught the attention of a priest named Eli. Once he hears her story, the priest had compassion on her. He prays for her and, in time, she becomes pregnant. When the child is born, she names her son Samuel, which means "the Lord heard." She is so thankful for his life; Hannah dedicates Samuel to the service of the Lord and entrusts his care to the priest Eli. According to our reading for today, Samuel stayed with Eli many years. This takes us to the scripture reading for today.

According to the text for today, God began to speak to Samuel when he was a boy. The term boy is vague. The great historian Josephus tells us, God began to speak to Samuel when he was twelve years old. That is a significant age in that culture because at twelve years old Samuel was considered a man. According to the text, Samuel was lying down in the temple when God began to speak to him. Samuel heard his name being called and assumes it was Eli who is summoning him. How rare was the word of the Lord? It took God three tries to get Samuel's attention. This is an interesting question. How many times would it take God to get your attention? If that question makes you think say, **"Amen!"** I don't want to sound critical of Samuel. You really can't blame him. How can you expect him to hear God?

We have a hard time hearing one another. Sometimes, we don't hear one another because our ears are broken. Have you ever watched television with someone who is hearing impaired? The volume is turned up all the way up. It is deafening. Did you know thirty-five million Americans are considered hearing impaired? That is 11.3% of our national population. Only 28.5% of hearing-impaired Americans use hearing aids. Sometimes, we don't hear because our ears are broken. Sometimes, we don't hear another because we are preoccupied. I will be the first to admit, I am guilty. I will be standing next to someone, but my mind is a million miles away. I say it regularly. "I'm sorry. What did you say?" Sometimes, we don't hear one another because we suffer, from what my dad called, selective hearing. There are somethings we simply just don't want to hear. How many times has the doctor told you to lose weight and go on a diet? You can't blame Samuel for not hearing God. We have a hard time hearing one another. However, the story is not about hearing other people. The story is about not hearing God.

Look at the text with me one more time. It is the middle of the night and the characters in the story are down for the day. God calls out to the boy not once, but three times. Each time, the boy assumes it is the priest. Each time, the boy breaks the silence of the

night. It is on the third time the priest begins to understand. He instructs the boy to go back to his bed and wait for God to call again. If the Lord speaks to him again, then answer, "Your servant is listening." What is Eli doing? The aging priest is positioning Samuel, so he has the best possible opportunity to hear God. He didn't tell him to take a bath. He didn't tell him to tell the neighbors. He didn't tell him to start his chores. He told him to lay in the silence of his bed and listen for God. One of the reasons Samuel heard God was he was in perfect position to hear the Almighty. So, this is the question you must answer.

Are you putting yourself in the best possible position to hear God? The people at Beliefnet say there are eight ways to discern God's will for your life. This list speaks to me and I hope this list speaks to you too.

1. **Pray** – If you pray daily you are not alone. According to the Pew Research Group, 55% of Americans pray daily. They also tell us 23% of Americans never pray. If you want to hear God pray!
2. **Read the Bible** – The Bible is God's word. Don't read the Bible to study it. Read the Bible for the edification of your soul. Lifeway Research tells us 9% of American have read the entire more than once. 11% of Americans have read the entire Bible at least once. 10% of Americans have never read a single word in the Bible. If you want to hear God read the Bible!
3. **Find a quiet space** – Have you ever tried to find complete quiet. It is hard. Our world is filled with noise. The music is always playing. The television is always on. Someone is always talking. Someone is always cutting down a tree or mowing the lawn. It is hard to hear God through all the noise. If you want to hear God find a quiet place!
4. **Read spiritually rich material** – The Christian faith is more than 2,000 years old. God has touched every generation, and, in every generation, people have written about their experiences with God. They have written about their insights into God's ways. Read what Augustine had to say. Read what Calvin had to say. Read what Knox had to say. Read what Wesley had to say. If you want to hear God read spiritually rich material!
5. **Look for God** – At Group Work Camps, they call it a God sighting. If you train yourself to look for God in this world, you will find him. It may be in the beauty of nature. It may be in the kindness of a friend. It may be in the generosity of a stranger. When was the last time you looked for God? If you want to hear God look for God!
6. **Talk to other believers** – The Christian faith was never meant to lived out in isolation. It is a community experience. That is why church is so important. In the true church we don't complain and criticize. In the true church we

encourage and support. In the true church we are honest with one another and hunger for what is best. If you want to hear God talk to other believers!

7. **Worship** – Worship is a great opportunity to hear God. It may be in the words of the message? It may be in the words of the music or at a time of prayer. God speaks to many during worship or attend worship regularly. Did you know, according to the Pew Research Group, 37% of Americans attend church regularly? If you want to hear God worship!

8. **Know yourself** – Sometimes our own self-image makes us deaf to God. Do you remember this statistic from last week? According to NBC News, 85% of Americans suffer from a low esteem. Maybe one of the reasons we don't hear God, is we don't like ourselves? If you want hear God know yourself!

This is the point. Eli positioned Samuel to hear God. There was no guarantee. However, it heightened the opportunity. Are you giving yourself the best possible opportunity to hear God? If that makes you think say, "**Amen!**"

It has been a month since Kathryn, and I returned home from Scotland. I will admit I miss that special land. I miss the history, the landscape and the Scottish people. I have told you this in the past. I occasionally need an adventure. Part of the adventure in Scotland was traveling by train. Every day, I would check the train schedules. We traveled during non-peak hours, so it would be easier. Nearly every day, we would sit together on the train and soak up the scenery. One day, the car was full, and we were forced to sit apart. She sat with a couple from Sweden and discussed the royal family. I sat next to a young man, who was lost in thought. When I first arrived, he seemed annoyed. He was forced to move his sack lunch from my seat. I apologized and introduced himself. He told me his first name and said he was a local. I began to tell him how impressed I was with Scotland and told him about how fortune he was to live there. I told him about where our travels took us in Scotland. I told him where we were going to travel in Scotland. I told him about where I live in America. I told him about my job. I told him about my family. I told him about all the rain we had in the spring. I told him about my passion for baseball. I told him I missed my dog, Macy. I told him everything. Then, it hit me. I had been doing all the talking. I stopped talking and looked at him for a response. He was a million miles away. When he finally looked at me, he pushed his shaggy hair back and pulled his earbuds out. He looked at me and said, "Did you say something? I can't hear anything when I am listening to my music." I simply said, "That is fine", and I stopped talking. Why waste your breath if someone isn't listening? Why waste your breath if someone doesn't want to listen? Could that be our story?

God is talking to us, but we just aren't listening. It isn't a matter of our ears being broken. The thirty-five million hearing impaired Americans are not excluded from divine communication. It could be we are just too busy to hear God. We live in an incredibly

fast paced society. There just isn't enough time to get everything done. I'm guilty. I don't waste time, but I misuse time. They say without rest our health will decay. I say fast pace living will impede your spiritual life. Could it be we are so preoccupied with life, we don't have time to listen for God? Or, could it be we don't want to listen to God because we are afraid of what God is going to say. We want God to say he loves and accepts us. We don't want God to say, we are sinners who need to repent. We don't want God to say, we are a disappointment. This is the question you must answer.

Are you putting yourself in the best possible position to hear God? I hope the answer is yes, because Bryant H. McGill isn't wrong. Do you remember his quote? He once said, *"One of the sincerest forms of respect is actually listening to what another has to say."* And all of God's people said, **"Amen!"**